

Ballot Measure 1

Signatures for Initiative and Referendum Petitions

BALLOT QUESTION

This amendment changes how to gather signatures for an initiative or referendum petition. It requires signatures from more of the voting districts in the State. It says that signers must be from at least 30 of the 40 house districts, three more than now required. It further requires signatures from each of 30 districts to be at least equal to seven percent of the voters who voted in each of these districts in the last general election. Currently only one signer from a district satisfies the requirement for district participation. The total number of statewide signatures required does not change.

SHOULD THIS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BE ADOPTED?

YES ☐

NO ☐

BALLOT MEASURE SUMMARY

Prepared by the Legislative Affairs Agency

This measure changes the signature requirements for initiative and referendum petitions. Now, a petition must be signed by voters from at least two-thirds of the house districts in the state. This measure would require signatures of voters from at least three-fourths of the house districts in the state. Also, in each of those house districts, at least seven percent of the number of voters who voted in that district in the last general election would need to sign.

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

Expanding Democracy

Ballot Measure 1 makes Alaska's initiative process more representative and more democratic.

In 1956, the authors of Alaska's Constitution created a process to allow citizens to put initiatives on the state's ballots. The Constitution's framers ensured that, in addition to the legislative process, Alaskans could make and change laws directly at the voting booth. To place an initiative on the ballot, supporters must gather signatures amounting to at least 10% of the number of people who voted in the most recent general election, including at least one signature each from 27 (two-thirds) of the 40 house districts. The framers of the Constitution wanted to ensure that no particular part of the state could place an initiative on the ballot without some support from throughout the State; this is why our Constitution includes a geographic distribution requirement.

However, Alaska has changed since 1956. There were

three areas of the state with roughly equivalent populations then (Southeast, Fairbanks/Interior and Anchorage). Today, one area has a much higher concentration of our population. Also, communication, technology and transportation have improved since our Constitution was written. It is much easier to send signature books around the state to gather support for an issue, or to get one signature in a large city from someone who lives in a remote area.

Currently, most initiatives placed on the ballot have little support from many areas of the state. For example, an average of only 59 voters from Ketchikan, Alaska's fourth largest city, signed each of the petitions for the last ten initiatives to reach the ballot.

Ballot Measure 1 helps achieve the framers' goals of true geographic distribution and statewide support.

There are numerous examples from other states of the problems caused by unchecked use of citizen initiatives. Legislators from other western states complain that they are unable to do what they were elected to do because of initiatives that tie their hands, restricting their ability to balance budgets and solve significant fiscal issues.

Ballot Measure 1 ensures that initiatives truly reflect the wishes and goals of more Alaskans, and not just those of well-funded outside interests.

This amendment would not create an undue hardship for people who want to get initiatives on the ballot. Among the ten initiatives that have been on the ballot since 1998, sponsors would have had to gather an average of 935 additional valid signatures statewide to comply with this new constitutional requirement. In fact, Measure 1 only requires signatures from as few as 2.4 and at most 6.4 percent of registered voters in each district.

Ballot Measure 1 was placed on the ballot with the support of two-thirds of the members of the Alaska State House and three-fifths of Alaska's 20 Senators.

Groups Supporting Ballot Measure 1 include the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce, the Alaska Outdoor Council, the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Alaska Miners' Association.

Vote Yes on Ballot Measure 1. Let's export democracy to **all** areas of Alaska.

Bill Williams
State Representative

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STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION

When convention delegates drafted Article XI of Alaska's Constitution they provided a mechanism for citizens to put initiatives before Alaska's voters. They gave Alaska's citizens a direct avenue to affect changes the political system is unable, or unwilling, to make. Initiatives have been used by both liberals and conservatives, and often non-political groups, to take issues directly to the people.

The initiative process is not perfect. Some initiatives are declared unconstitutional immediately after passage. In recent years there has been concern among many Alaskans regarding a trend to make fish and game management policy via initiative. This is dubbed by many as "ballot box biology". It is a serious concern for many Alaskans; professional biologists and fish and game managers, and those who represent rural Alaska. The prevalence of outside money and interest groups in ballot initiatives is also a legitimate concern. There are valid criticisms of the initiative process. **Making it more difficult for citizens to advance initiatives is not, however, the answer.**

There are already numerous restrictions on citizen initiatives. Signatures must be collected in two-thirds of the legislative districts (the same percentage of votes required in the legislature that placed ballot measure #1 on the ballot). Initiatives cannot be used to make appropriations or amend the constitution, and they are heavily scrutinized by the Attorney General. Many initiatives are not even approved for circulation. Initiative petition sponsors must collect signatures (ten percent of the number voting in the most recent general election in at least 27 districts). **Raising the bar to seven percent of the voters in each of thirty 30 districts, in addition to the overall requirement of ten percent of all voters, is a drastic and unnecessary change.**

Increasing the percentage of signatures required in individual house districts, as well as the number of districts in which signatures must be collected does indeed create a new hurdle for Alaska's citizens. The proposed change is intended to make it much more difficult to get issues on the ballot. Well-funded groups that routinely hire signature gatherers will not, however, be deterred. It will, though, create an additional and unnecessary burden on truly citizen based initiative efforts, and certainly would not "expand democracy."

I may not personally agree with every initiative, or the motives of the backers, but I would rather defeat bad ideas on merits than restrict citizen access to the public process. **Enacting a constitutional amendment to create additional barriers for initiatives will only serve to widen the gap between people and their government.** The provisions of the proposed constitutional amendment would only make the initiative process

more cumbersome for truly citizen-based initiative efforts. It will not prevent well-financed special interests. These special interests would simply pay the extra cost required to collect extra signatures in additional districts.

I believe Alaskan voters will reject the notion that ballot measure #1 "expands democracy" and will reject this proposed constitutional amendment.

Bill Stoltze
State Representative

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